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462 she herself had picked or dug. In preparing the material for
476 storage, too, the women would sit in a big circle, pounding cherries
[251] for instance, one woman helping to crush the cherries brought in by another. But, again, while it lightened the work of an individual woman who might have gathered more than the others, there was no pooling of resources. Sociability and friendship were apparently the chief motives for joining such a work group.

463 While there was a slight amount of occupational specialization, there was no real division of labor in the sense that persons with, say, supernatural power to cure, and who were well paid for their services, would be supported by this means alone. Nor could a man live, for instance, by specializing in raiding and raising horses. Every man, whatever else he might do, would have to make at least an attempt to hunt. Similarly, regardless of the temporary division of tasks which might be assigned among the women of the household, no individual woman could profit sufficiently through her ability to cut and fit lodge covers or through her ability to embroider well. Some, who were more skilled at one task than another, might perhaps devote more time and energy to that pursuit, but the rewards therefor were more in the nature of prestige than of direct economic advantage. An old woman for instance might be adept at making buffalo-hair rope. Men desiring to have it, would give her things in exchange for it, but it is doubtful if she would receive sufficient from this one type of manufacture to make her independent of relatives, even so far as food was concerned.

464 The potential supply of labor consisted in all able-bodied men of the tribe from the age of about 17 or 18, at which time a young
[582] man was sufficiently skilled to hunt seriously, and of all able-bodied females from about the age of twelve, the time at which the
[162] average girl was married and was supposed to have been trained to woman's work. The unbalance of the sexes in favor of females, a marked feature in the population of the northern plains tribes,[4]
461 plus the fact that the tasks allotted to women could be begun at a much earlier age than those undertaken by men, meant that the amount of labor contributed by the woman, in manufacturing economic goods, was greater than the amount of labor available

[4] Cf. Wissler, 1936 (a), p. 38.

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on the part of the men for supplying the raw materials. This, however, was more than offset by the fact that the time consumed in producing the raw materials was less than that required to process and complete the manufacture thereof. The following calculation will give at least a rough approximation of the situation. It was estimated by our Gros Ventre informants that one woman would be able to dress about twenty robes a season, i.e., robes taken in the fall hunt and dressed with the fur on. This means she had to devote the equivalent of 60 full days' time to this task alone.[7] Actually she would not be free to work on robes exclusively, as she had to dress other kinds of skins, carry on her ordinary daily routine of procuring fuel and water, care of children, preparation of the daily meals, and in addition cut the enormous quantities of meat to be dried for winter consumption.[8] In contrast, if we can rely on Hornaday's figures, 15–25 men killed about a thousand buffalo in a fall season,[9] which means, taking the higher figure, one man alone would average more than two women could handle.

Value

Given the abundant supply of game, especially of buffalo, and the methods of exploiting it, the individual who controlled the relatively scarce means of production was in a position to command a larger labor supply and consequently to produce a larger surplus. The Boy summed up the situation thus: "The Gros Ventres in their old way of life used to want a lot of horses because they knew from experience that if a man had a lot of horses he could acquire a little wealth and position in life. If, for instance, a family had a lot of horses, the man might have three or four or five buffalo horses with which to chase game and would bring in lots of skins and meat and could afford more wives, and the more wives he had the bigger and wealthier he would be. He could have

[7] Denig, pp. 540–41, estimates three days' work to prepare one robe for market and states that the preparation of 25 to 30 robes was an excellent winter's work for one woman, with the average at 18 to 20 robes.

[8] Hornaday, p 436, states that a whole buffalo cow, if economically worked up, yields about 55 lbs. of pemmican and 45 lbs. of dried meat.

[9] Hornaday, p. 465.

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to himself: 'He gave to me, so I'll give to him.' But no one was 431
in duty bound to give the equivalent in return."

Within the network of kinship obligations, exchange was more 602
often indirect than reciprocal. A man could expect help from his 431
father and from his mother's brother without being under obligation to return goods in like amount—he was supposed to repay them by conducting himself in such a way that they could be proud of him. This meant that the man in his turn would be especially generous toward his sister and her children, that he would adequately fulfill his duties toward his wife's people and provide goods in sufficient amount that his wife could fulfill her own obligations especially those toward her own brother's wife and children.

When others saw fit to honor an individual, say for bravery in 554
warfare, that person was supposed to give away goods in large 431
amounts to show that he appreciated the honor; and his relatives would join with him in giving, thereby increasing his, as well as their own, prestige. Likewise in paying for services, such as those [602]
of a medicine man, relatives would "chip in" to the best of their ability, the one assuming the largest part of the burden receiving the greatest boost in public esteem. A person who impoverished himself by giving generously at such times would be sure that, with his reputation thus established, he would soon be the recipient of gifts dispensed by others in like liberality. Meantime, however, he could not afford to sit back awaiting the presents from others. He would soon lose his coveted reputation and be referred to as [461]
lazy, an epithet strong enough to bring tears to the eyes of a man who entertained any ambitions whatsoever.

If a person were in need, it was possible for him to request 426
what was necessary, preferably from some relative who was well- 558
to-do, and usually his request would be met. But a continual borrower lost status and a limit was thus put upon indiscriminate "begging." One woman stated: "If your sister asked you for something you would not refuse her, but it was to your brother's wife you would give things voluntarily. A woman had great pride in keeping her brother's wife well-dressed, and if you had an [607]
extra supply of dried berries she is the one you would think of first."

Thus we have the basis for the generalizations the Gros Ventres 431